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RUEHZP/AMEMBASSY PANAMA IMMEDIATE 0009
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TBILISI 002062

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SUBJECT: GEORGIA MISSILE INVESTIGATION UPDATE -- AUGUST 15

REF: TBILISI 2025

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Mark X. Perry for reasons 1.4(b&d).

Summary

1. (C) International experts have completed a preliminary report on the August 6 missile incident. Key conclusions are: the aircraft entered Georgian airspace from Russia, and the Georgian Air Force does not possess aircraft capable of firing this type of missile or of flying the profile flown by the intruding aircraft. The expert team and Georgian officials briefed the diplomatic community on the report August 15. Georgian Deputy Defense Minister Batu Kutelia said Georgia continues to encourage countries to send experts to review the report and the evidence. He announced that Estonian and British experts would arrive soon. Kutelia said Georgia would meet with Russian investigators, but would not agree to a bilateral Russian-Georgian investigation. End Summary.

The Plane Came from Russia

2. (SBU) Following three days of work investigating the incident, the international group of experts (reftel), led by a Swede and consisting of members from Sweden, Latvia, Lithuania, and the U.S., presented an initial report to the Georgian Ministry of Defense. The report contained the following key findings:

-- On three occasions August 6, one unidentified aircraft from Russia flew into Georgian airspace, making one short and then two deeper incursions, the latter lasting approximately eleven minutes each.

-- The missile that impacted near Tsitelubani -- which did not explode but which had burn marks on the rocket motor nozzle -- was a Russian-designed Kh-58 (or AS-11 Kilter) anti-radiation missile.

-- Several eyewitnesses saw an aircraft in the area of impact, and some saw an object leaving the aircraft with a trail of smoke. Radar information of the third pass into Georgian territory indicates an object separating from the aircraft.

-- The Georgian Air Force does not possess aircraft equipped with or able to launch Kh-58 missiles, nor does it have aircraft able to fly the profile flown by the intruding

aircraft.

-- The expert group was not able to identify the aircraft type or origin, or to verify reports of a second impact or a MANPAD being fired at the aircraft.

Getting the Facts Out

13. (C) The Georgian government distributed the report to diplomatic representatives at a briefing August 15. Kutelia explained that the purpose of the briefing was to share the report with diplomats who could then share it with their capitals, to answer questions and to get comments and suggestions. In the absence of the Swedish chair of the group (who had already left Tbilisi) the U.S. team leader led the presentation, inviting comments from other group members. He focused on the facts established in the report, avoiding conjecture, and the audience appeared to accept the report as professional and credible.

14. (C) Kutelia said the Georgian government had not decided when to make the report public, but noted it would be soon. He said the report sufficiently answers the important questions, and the Georgian public and the international community are eager to receive the information. He said Georgia continues to encourage countries to send experts to review the report, evaluate the evidence, and either sign or adjust the report as they believe appropriate. Kutelia announced that an Estonian expert would arrive August 15 and an expert from the U.K. would arrive August 17. Asked whether the report should be seen as an interim report or not, Kutelia responded that the Georgian government sees this as the expert group's official report, but the document

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remains open for others to review and sign.

Russian Machinations

15. (C) Kutelia said Russia had requested permission for a flight of Russian experts to come to Georgia for a joint investigation. He said the Georgians would let them come and welcome the bilateral consultations, but clarified that this would not be a bilateral investigation. He stressed that Georgia has already sent all of its evidence to the Russians but has received no response to Georgia's request for Russia to share its evidence.

16. (C) Following the briefing, Charge asked Kutelia why the Georgian government had decided to release the report so quickly, causing ambiguity about whether the international group would continue to meet and whether there would be another, final report. Kutelia said the Georgians felt compelled to release the report now for two reasons: because the Swedes had already sent it to EU capitals, and because the Georgians are worried about Russian machinations and wanted to get the report out as quickly as they could. He emphasized that the Georgians' strategy is to keep the report open and active while welcoming other experts, governments, or international organizations to review it and lend their weight to it.

17. (C) Georgian concerns about Russian efforts to conduct a separate investigation and to promote alternative alleged conclusions are nothing new. According to a letter from Georgian State Minister for Conflict Resolution to the U.S. Ambassador, on August 8 "high-level military circles in Russia...parachuted a special team of the Military Prosecutor's Office," headed by Eduard Grikorov, into Tskhinvali to pressure the Russian commander of the Joint

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Peacekeeping Force (JPKF) to collect and disseminate false information to undermine the conclusions (which the Georgians consider "professional") of the August 7 JPKF investigation. Georgian officials are also aware of the many reports in

Russian media pitching theories that Georgia is behind the incident, often based on specific but false details, such as that the Georgians destroyed the missile (they in fact detonated only the warhead for safety reasons) or on alleged witnesses whom the JPKF found August 8 to dispute the August 7 accounts that the aircraft came from the north.

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